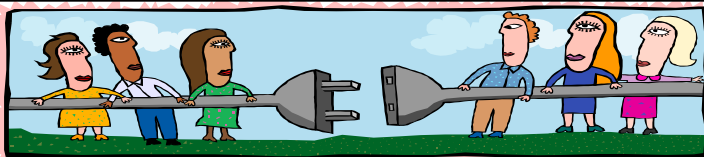


Consumer Connection



Issue 2 - April 2002

A quarterly publication of the Missouri Public Service Commission
Public Information & Education Department

The Scoop on 900 Numbers

Before making a 900 number call, you need to know how much the call will cost, what you will get for your money, and what will happen if you have a billing dispute.

The Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission have rules that govern the practices of telephone companies with regard to 900 numbers.

900 Number Ads: All print, radio and television ads for 900 number services must include:

- √ the total cost if there's a flat fee;
- √ the per-minute rate charge, as well as a minimum charge;
- √ the range of fees and initial cost of the call and any minimum charges;
- √ the cost of any other 900 number to which you may be transferred; and
- √ any other fees the service might charge.

When you dial a 900 number that costs more than \$2, you should hear an introductory message. You cannot be charged for this message. It must briefly describe the service, the name of the company providing the service, and the cost of the call. It also must state that anyone under age 18 needs parental permission to complete the call. Once this information is provided, you must be given three seconds to hang up without incurring a charge.

900 Number Billing Disputes: For each 900 number call, your statement should include the date, time and, for services that have per-minute rates, the length of the call. Your statement must also include a local or toll-free number for questions about your pay-per-call charges.

The phone company cannot disconnect your regular local or long-distance service if you don't pay a 900 number charge. However, you could be blocked from making future calls to 900 numbers if you don't pay legitimate 900 number charges.

Tips for Avoiding 900 Number Problems

- Deal only with reputable companies.
- Think twice before calling a 900 number for a "free gift."
- Don't confuse 900 numbers with toll-free 800, 866, 877 or 888 numbers.
- **Talk with your children.** Make sure they understand they shouldn't call 900 numbers without your permission.
- Call your phone company for 900 number-blocking information.

*For more information, call 1-877-FTC-HELP
(1-877-382-4357)*

RELAY MISSOURI

Just dial 7-1-1 to place a relay call!

Relay Missouri is a free service that facilitates communications services for people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-disabled.

This service allows text-telephone users to communicate with regular telephone users through specially trained Communications Assistants.



This service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year anywhere in the world with no restrictions on the number, length, or type of calls. No records are kept on the content of these calls.

Revenue for relay services comes from a general fee on telephone service paid by all consumers.

711 is an alternative to dialing any of these 10-digit, toll-free numbers.

**1-800-735-2966
TTY/ASCII/VCO/HCO**

**1-800-735-2466
Voice**

**1-877-735-7877
Speech-to-Speech**

**1-800-520-7309
Spanish**



Leaking faucets?

Toilet running constantly?

Your dollars may be going down the drain.

How to Check for

Water Leaks

Your water meter can be a valuable tool in detecting water leaks in and around your home.

Follow these easy steps to check for water leaks.

- Make sure no water is running.
- Turn off all faucets and water-consuming appliances - even your automatic ice maker and your evaporative cooler.
- Read your water meter.
- Write down the current reading including tenths of a cubic foot.
- Read the meter again after 30 to 60 minutes.
- If the meter reading has changed, you have a leak.

Running Toilet -- A toilet that runs continuously can use as much as 4,000 gallons of water per day! Even a slow, silent leak can add gallons to your bill. To check for a toilet leak, put a few drops of food coloring in the tank and see if it seeps into the bowl. If it does, replace the flapper valve and/or the rubber gasket at the bottom of the tank.

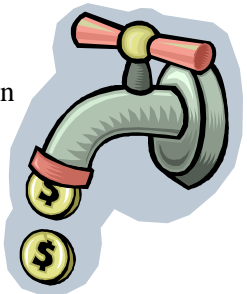
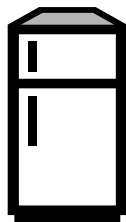
Faucets -- Make sure your faucets turn off completely. Even a slow drip can use as much as 5,000 gallons of water per month. A steady stream can lose up to 21,000 gallons per month.

Energy Saving Consumers

Energy officials say refrigerators that are 20 years old can use as much as \$200 worth of energy annually.

Department of Energy guidelines now require that new refrigerators use at least 30 percent less energy than those sold in 1993 - the previous time federal guidelines were set. New refrigerators consume \$60 or less energy each year.

Modern refrigerators are built to last from eight to 12 years, so you can expect to get your money's worth. The refrigerator is one of your biggest home expenses, and it is responsible for as much as 20 percent of your home energy bill. A new energy-efficient refrigerator can pay for itself in energy savings over a lifetime.



Research the different models and pick the one that fits your family's needs. Check the energy rating, and if it carries the Energy Star label, you can save an extra 10 percent in energy costs each year.

When choosing a new refrigerator, consider the size:

- for one or two people, consider a refrigerator of about 12 cu. ft.
- for three or four people, consider a unit of about 14 to 17 cu. ft.
- for each additional person, add 2 cu. ft.

* If you're considering moving the old fridge to the basement, think again. It usually takes a lot less energy to operate a large refrigerator than two smaller ones, especially if your old unit is an energy-guzzler.

* Try to locate your fridge away from heat sources such as a radiator, heat vent, stove, dishwasher, and direct sunlight.

* Don't open and close the refrigerator door unnecessarily.

* Place frozen food inside the refrigerator to thaw. This will help keep the unit cool and will save a little energy.

* Vacuum the coils on the back or under side of the fridge often.

Microwaves:

Use your microwave to cook small to medium amounts of food. It uses less energy than a conventional oven. The microwave oven is also good for reheating food. Foods cook quicker in the microwave if placed on the outer edges of a rotating tray rather than in the center.

Toaster Ovens:

Toaster ovens consume much less energy than a conventional oven. It's faster and ideal for cooking small quantities of food. A well insulated toaster oven consumes 50 percent less energy than a conventional oven.

Electric Frying Pans:

Electric frying pans require less electricity than the range top to cook the same quantity of food. To prevent wasting energy, use a lid to keep heat in.

Who to Contact:

Missouri Public Service Commission
Consumer Hotline **1-800-392-4211**
or email: pscinfo@mail.state.mo.us

Mail your inquiry or complaint to:

Missouri Public Service Commission
Consumer Services Department
P.O. Box 360
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0360

